NEW SERIAL—"THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR"
(By GEORGE GRIFFITH, Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," and "The Syren of the Skies.")

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 298.—Vol. XI. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 15, 1894. [Price One Penny.

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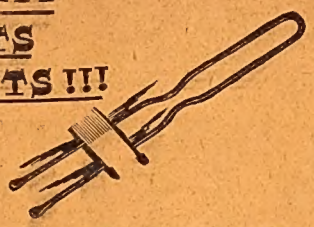

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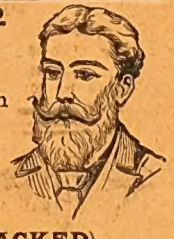

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 298.—Vol. XI. *FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 15, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

A DAUGHTER OF THE DESERT.

A CARAVAN was plodding southward, long ago, over the glistening sand, under the torturing sun, crossing the great desert between Persia and India. The path was plainly marked by white and bleaching bones.

There were skeletons at every feast, no matter where they spread their mats; for this was the great highway between the old world of Persia and the newly conquered realm of India.

The caravan was as mixed as a caravan could be. It was a combination of small families and individuals, making the journey together for mutual protection against the Thugs and Brinjari who infested the desert. Each family lived and moved by itself, holding little intercourse with the rest, except in time of danger, when they united under a common chief.

Among the poorest yet most exclusive of the pilgrims was a family of three—a father, mother, and boy of five years. Very often they looked sadly backward; then, as if struggling to gather hope from the opposite direction, they looked forward again, over that interminable gleam of sand.

All that they possessed was borne upon the back of one donkey and yet his burden was so light that the mother rode beside it. It was nothing, in fact, but a bag of grain on one side for the donkey, a sack of maize meal on the other, with a bunch of red peppers, for the family, and the mutual goat-skin of water between them.

The mother, sitting behind the water-cask, was a beautiful Persian woman; frail and delicate, and very different from what one would expect to find upon the desert with a mixed caravan. The father, a tall and powerful man, walked beside the donkey, and much of the time the boy sat upon his shoulders.

These shoulders were so broad and strong that the little fellow could not imagine himself to be any possible burden; his black eyes were merry, and his red lips laughed, and the plume on his turban bobbed about as he tossed his head, as proud as any king upon a royal throne. And it was, indeed, a throne that was royal, little as he or any one else, except the woman riding upon the donkey, dreamed of such a thing. In truth, however, he was sitting upon the shoulders of the crown prince of Persia.

Serious complications had arisen between the royal family and various factions of the government, endangering the life of the little prince, and since he was two years old he had been carefully hidden. Even the boy himself was kept in ignorance of his rank. The secret escaped, at last, and his life was again in peril. His parents' only hope lay in removing him to some distant land. They thought of India; and rather than trust the precious charge to others, they went themselves, disguised as pilgrims, in the mixed caravan.

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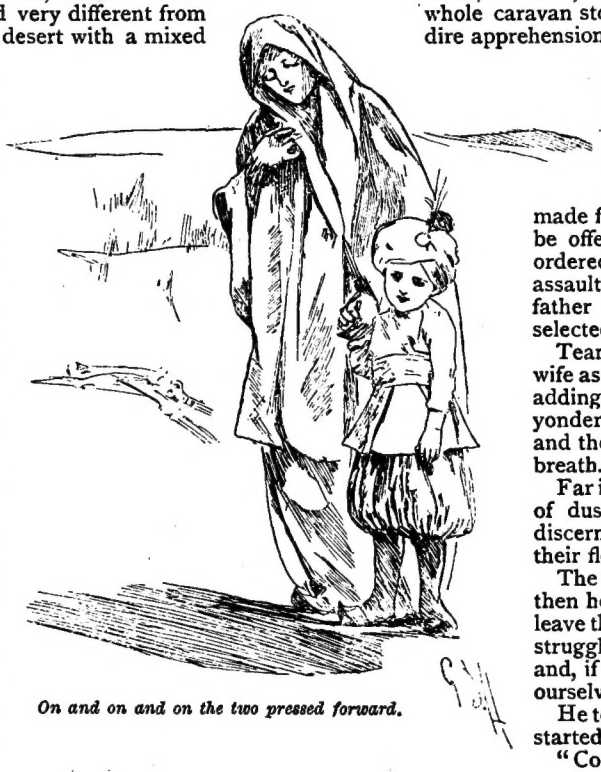
It was the eighth day of their journey, and but six days remained. "Have courage, Light of My Eyes," the man said to his wife. "More than the half is behind us, and better days lie beyond this desert sand. Thy face is sadder than its wont. Thou art not so well to-day."

"I am as well, Dearest Breath of My Body," she replied, laying her hand tenderly upon her husband's shoulder, while the boy, sitting upon the other shoulder, leaned over, behind his father's head, to caress it. "I am as well; but I dreamed a dream last night, three times repeated. I stood in the desert, with our son. I leaned upon a staff, and he on me. Out of the South there came a mighty hand and grasped the staff."

The mother shuddered, and for a moment clung, trembling, to her husband's shoulder. Then in a faltering voice she continued, "I gave one cry to Allah, as I fell, and lo! an angel stood beside me and each time, in my dream, I heard him say, 'Fear not. Thou must go hence, but I shall abide.'"

The husband tried to comfort her, but he too was troubled. In his day and country a dream thrice repeated assumed the importance of a message from the Most High.

Late in the afternoon the mother touched her husband, and silently pointed to the south, where a little cloud lay just above the horizon. He shaded his eyes from the fierce glare, and watched it anxiously as he walked. Others seeing him did the same, till soon, without a word of command, the whole caravan stood still, watching that cloud in dire apprehension.



On and on and on the two pressed forward.

It came from the desert, not the sky. It grew rapidly larger, and came directly toward them. It was not caused by the wind; neither was it a peaceful caravan. In great commotion and consternation, preparations were made for such feeble defence as could be offered. The strongest men were ordered to the front, to receive the first assault, and of course the stalwart father was one of the first to be selected.

Tears stood in the eyes of his frail wife as she bravely said farewell to him, adding, "I fear it is my dream, for yonder hand cometh from the south, and thou art my staff, my heart and my breath."

Far in the distance, beneath the cloud of dust, keen eyes could now easily discern the forms of armed men, urging their fleet horses over the sand.

The husband hesitated for a moment, then he replied: "Fear not. I will not leave thee. It will be a hopeless struggle. We might as well go on, and, if danger comes to us, face it by ourselves."

He took the bridle of the donkey and started forward.

"Coward!" cried the leader of the

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caravan, seeing that he did not obey, "Go forward as I bid thee and help the guard."

"I have my own to protect, and for it I ask no help from thee," the father replied calmly, and, to the astonishment of every one, he went out alone upon the desert with the two he loved.

He urged the donkey forward at its utmost speed, but they were still near enough to hear the savage yells as the robbers came upon the caravan. They did not dare look back, but it was easy to understand the sounds which reached them; the clash of arms, the shrieks of the dying, the yell of the victor, the groan of the victim, the silence of triumph, as when the vulture begins to glut himself upon his prey.

Harder and faster the father urged the donkey till at last the dumb animal, utterly exhausted, lay down upon the sand and refused to move.

"Take the boy with thee, my Sun and my Moon," the father said, in a choking voice. "Go as fast and as far as thy strength will bear thee. If the animal will not move, then I will take the food and water from his back and follow as quickly as I may. It may be that the robbers will not care to come after us, and if they do, they will not go beyond the burden, which is all they seek. Go! It was for him we started. It is for him that we struggle now. Go, and Allah be by thy side."

It was not a time for words. The wife looked into her husband's eyes, knowing well that it was for the last time; but she looked at their little boy and, silently taking his hand, turned forward again, upon the path marked by whitening skeletons.

On and on and on the two pressed forward, as long as their strength held out.

They walked, they ran. They rested for a moment, and then toiled on again. The rolling sand-hills soon hid the objects behind them from their view, and the sand shrubs rose above them. No sound, no sign came from behind, and when the red sun sank into the sea of sand, the mother fell prostrate, under a dry and crackling sage bush, alone in the desert with her son. There was a wild gleam in her dark eyes as they looked upon the boy beside her. The lips were parched that tried to speak to him. The hand was cold as ice that caressed him, as he lay upon the sand, with his head upon her arm, and slept.

Hour after hour those eyes, too full of agony for tears, watched the stars as they flashed and sparkled. Hour after hour the ears were strained to catch the sound of the footfall of the man she loved, in a desperate hope against the surest conviction that the Hand from the South had taken away the staff. Hour after hour, in bitterest agony, she saw the night drag out its cold and silent length, and morning dawned.

Looked down upon her two little ones.

Fiery and red, as when it set, the sun came up out of the great, lifeless sea, and the boy opened his eyes. He turned to his mother. She was lying upon the sand, at a little distance. Her eyes were open, but she was only partially conscious. She did not notice him. He crept towards her. What was it she was holding in her arms? Could it be an angel? He had listened while she told her dream, and had understood more than his parents supposed. He realised that his father had been taken away and that his mother had fallen upon the desert. Could that be the angel? He heard the plaintive wail of a little baby girl, pleading for nourishment which the mother could not give, and wondered if it could be the voice of an angel, saying, "Fear not. Thou must go hence, but I shall abide."

The tortures of the day were over at last, but it was only that the tortures of another night might begin. The stars were like flashing darts to pierce them. Cold and white the moonlight flooded the wide expanse of death. Throughout the day no groan or murmur had escaped from the pale lips of the mother, but as the night came on, she breathed one deep, quivering sigh, and, slowly rising, looked down upon her two little ones.

She felt the icy chill of death creeping over her. She could not lie there dead between them. She took off her long sarai, and bound it about the baby girl. She took off her only remaining garment, and laid it gently over the boy. "She is thy sister," she whispered in his ear. "Allah will help thee to guard her until I come again."

Kneeling on the sand, with her face toward Mecca, she touched her forehead to the ground, and the little boy remembered afterward that she said, "Thou knowest they are a prince and a princess, born to the throne of Persia. They are thine. Do with them as thou wilt." Then she rose to her feet and, weak and tottering, walked slowly away from them.

That was the last that was ever known of her.

In a stupor, between death and sleep, the little ones lay till the sun was ready to rise again; when out of the desert there came another caravan, moving as they had been moving, from Persia toward India.

There was no mixture of elements about this caravan. Gold and jewels glistened upon the camel trappings. Swords and shields and spears shone and flashed in the early morning light. The camels were young and fleet, and the swift-footed dromedaries seemed almost to glide along the glistening surface.

Why not? The lord of the caravan was the great sheik, Selim Christi, prime minister of Akbar, the Emperor of India. He was returning from a royal embassage to the throne of Persia, and the great white camel which bore him, in the midst of the royal guard, was passing the sage bush when a faint wail from the folds of the swaddled sarai attracted his attention. He lifted his hand. The entire caravan halted, and at his command soldiers opened the sarai and discovered Allah's treasure hidden there.

The children were given in charge of the women of the caravan, and soldiers were detailed to guard them. Their lives were staked upon the lives of the two to whom Selim Christi offered his protection, and when that gorgeous caravan swept through the marble gate of Futthepore Sackri, the magnificent capital where Akbar reigned in all his glory, the children were rapidly gaining health and strength

They were at once taken into the royal harem, though nothing was known of their parentage; for the secret which had been disclosed to the boy in his mother's prayer only became impressed upon him as he recalled it, again and again, in the years that followed, and treasured it in his heart till, later in life, he had an opportunity to prove it true.

Under the powerful patronage of the prime minister the boy grew and prospered. The blood of monarchs flowing in his veins spoke for itself, and when his patron died he took his place as second only to the Emperor of India. He married the daughter of his preserver, and became the father of the world-renowned Nur Mahal, wife of the Emperor Shah Jehan, the woman whose tomb, the Taj Mahal at Agra, is known, wherever that which is beautiful is admired, as the finest specimen of architecture in the wide, wide world to-day; while the Desert's daughter, the little sister whom he defended, the angel who came to his mother, well fulfilled the promise of the dream. She did abide, not only for her time but for all time; for she was Lalla Rookh, the heroine of Tom Moore's immortal poem.

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The Frost Lily

MIDSUMMER WAKA had come. This is the greatest festival of the year among the Norse peasantry, and in Vik, the cluster of little houses which nestle in the bend of a great fjord, the vigil of St. John's Eve was kept with dancing, and drinking and song. The old belief of the Northmen, that those born near the sound of many waters are endowed with a natural gift of music, made the Vik fiddlers sought far and wide for the June merry-making of St. John's fête; and before many houses in the little village the Wolmar fire burned brightly in token of the noisy betrothal within.

Somewhat removed from the gaiety and revels of the night, the small white dwellings of old Liof Thure nestled in the long grasses full of clover-blooms, with a gravel-pathed garden at one side, overflowing with old-fashioned pink and white rose trees, and a long white fence at the other, leading down to a quay and the tossing green fjord, which looked violet-black in the shadows of the night.

The family of Thure was an old one, and had lived in this same spot for generations, looking at the grand, grey, fir-clad mountains and the wild, moss-grown boulders, and listening to the wash of the great water against the little landing-stage. The present occupants of the place were old Liof, who had never known a day's variation from his accustomed routine in his life-time; his six yellow-haired, strong-limbed sons, who looked like nothing so much as pictures of the old Norse Vikings: and the pride of her father's heart, sweet, imperious Gerda, the acknowledged beauty of Vik, who looked at him with her mother's eyes and face, and spoke to him in the tones of the woman whose life had gone out eighteen years ago, when she gave to her husband the girl-baby for whom he had so longed.

Gerda was wilful, spoiled, and tantalising. Her brothers had lost all patience with her, because she had laughed in the face of every honest fellow who would have married her, and because she loved many strange things that had no beauty to the sons of Liof Thure; the magpies, which are as much a part of Norse scenery as the invariable birches and pines; the blue gentians of the snow-capped heights; the yellow and white water-lilies of the Norwegian tarns, and the lady-ferns, which the first cold snow-winds of winter tinged with bright scarlet.

She gave to the wind and the weather the love that should have been a husband's, and worshipped the swift, wild rain which made the moss and ferns so lovely, and the flashing of the waters and the brilliant heavens above them when the sun went down. She loved to paddle her boat idly about the shores of the fjord, watching the colours deepening in the sky, and the gloom which spreads itself over all nature as the day dies, when she should have been merrymaking instead with some Norse lover, after the fashion of her people.

Of admirers, who would have willingly become something dearer, she had had more than any other maiden in Vik. She was bright, with an intelligence far beyond the average Scandinavian girl, such as was that of Hörsberg, the peasant painter of Sweden. She loved nature with all the consciousness of the Greek and the passion of the German; but she was practical and well-skilled in the arts which attract a Norse husband. She could prepare the flesh of the reindeer most deliciously with cream, which is used so lavishly in Norwegian cookery; she knew the concoction of each of the many cheeses beloved of the Scandinavian; she could bake great round ryecakes a foot and a half in diameter, and so flavour and dry them for the winter that they were like confections; and the large attic chamber of her father's house was hung around with her wardrobe, most of which was her own handiwork; snow-white wool aprons with brilliant red borders, linens, coloured prints, embroidered bodices, deer-skin coats, snow shoes and winter boots; for Liof was a well-to-do peasant, and had brought up his daughter in the belief that plenty and cleanliness in the matter of raiment elevated the Norwegian woman above her Swedish sister.

But to-night there was no sound of joy from the white house so close to the fjord. No light gleamed from the windows, and a hush seemed to have settled over the place, in marked contrast to the revels of the neighbourhood. Sweet-smelling odours of fragrant new-made hay filled the air, and a savage looking cow, which wore a collar and a tinkling bell, was wandering home from the far-off fields, and was the only sign of life about the Thure homestead.

Old Liof had gone for a visit with two Norwegians just returned from a fifteen-years' sojourn in the western states of America. They found old Norway very slow after the nervous bustle of the new world. The boys were making the most of their holiday, and had trudged away early in the morning, each bearing gifts to his sweetheart. Gerda had persistently refused to join in the pleasures of the festival of St. John, and had strayed out this delicious night, going from boulder to boulder, until she had clambered nearly to the top of the mountain through the lichen, whortleberries, and ferns.

She had moped all day, said the great, rough brothers, Olaf, and Byn, and Nils, and Brun, and Rolf; while Jarl, the youngest, and more nearly in sympathy with his sister, had watched her wistfully when she was among the red-currant bushes of the garden, and whispered softly to his brothers: "She will never forget him!"

One year before, upon this very St. John's eve, the little steamer which came tri-weekly from the Norse capital, bringing with it a breath of the great world, in the shape of tourists who found fjord-travelling a charming novelty, had stopped at the little quay nearest to Liof Thure's dwelling, late in the afternoon, when the purest of purple shadows were lying over the lake.

Gerda stood waiting for its arrival, and the mate handed to her a small parcel, which from its size and shape one could easily guess contained a pair of new shoes.

"Great Heavens, what a lovely girl!" exclaimed a voice in English, as the boat moved away, and, looking upward at the steamer's tiny deck, Gerda saw a man whose dark eyes spoke to her plainly the sentiments which her Norse ear failed to comprehend.

The superb fringes of her large, dark-blue eyes drooped as she walked away. He was an artist and an Anglo-Saxon, of that she was sure, for he had had sketch-book and pencil in hand, and bore about him the general air of assurance which characterises the Anglo-Saxon at home and abroad. She had seen many of them, who had passed through Vik, finding a constant interest in the exquisite scenery of the fjord, and the mountains of the water-falls, and the stretches of green slope, with the hay stacked on the wooden fences to dry; she smiled again the next afternoon, when she turned her boat homeward after a long pull, and remembered his tone and glance.

The evening was coming on, and the setting sun tinged the snow-tops a faint pink, while the green grass on the mountain side was covered with white daisies, like a powder of pearls. Her boat was filled with hare-bells and purplish heath-plants, and ferns and mignonette, and as she reached the small wooden bridge which stretched across an arm of the fjord,

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she saw a stranger leaning upon the rail watching her. It required no second glimpse to assure the Norse girl that it was he whose admiration of her had been so outspoken upon the steamer the night before. In a moment he was at her side.

"Let me help you," he exclaimed, as she gathered the boat's fragrant freight in her arms, after making the tiny craft fast, and although the tongue in which he spoke was a strange one to her, she needed no dictionary to interpret his actions as he walked homeward beside her, and easily persuaded old Liof Thure to accommodate him as a boarder.

He was a landscape student from Montreal, with dreams and a great ambition, and he had come to paint the wild beauties of the Norse scenery and the glinting sunshine which laughed through the tall, swaying pines.

For six months he had lived in the family of Liof Thure, and had acquired enough of the Norwegian to tell them of the distant city of his birth, of his hopes, and his prospects and his friends.

He had learned to listen with the keenest pleasure to the sweet voice of Gerda during the long days and evenings, when she explained to him the lore of her country, and the folk-tales of the North—of the castle of the pirate Erik, and the three hunters turned to stone; of the mystery of the parsley bed and the milk-white deer and the white worm of the witches; and how the spectre-cross in the enchanted garden frightened the Finnish sorcerers.

And as the days went by, the idea of a picture which should show the beauty of Gerda to the world filled his brain, and the hours when she posed to him as a model passed too swiftly for them both.

There was no word of love between them, but, day by day, the Canadian saw the sweet womanliness of this Northern girl, the rich nature still undeveloped, thought responsive with poignant feeling to each vibration of his own artistic soul, the spirit of true life, unfettered with the contractions and ceremonies of conventionality, a life high and wide, like the blue Scandinavian heaven above; he saw all this, he felt the inspiration of this continual contact with nature, and yet he did not tell her that his whole heart was hers, because of the elder brother across the sea, who would have deemed it an unchangeable blot upon many generations of financial prosperity, that the sole sharer with himself of great wealth should marry a Norse peasant girl.

Finally the picture was completed. There was the wide fjord stretching out to the ocean with silence and solitude on its waves, which caught the blood-red reflections of an angry sky. There was not a vessel in sight, and so well had the artist caught the spirit of the scene, that the slow, majestic sweep of the heaving rollers seemed to die out without breaking and to give place to others, and against the gathering darkness the exquisite slenderness of a woman's figure stood clear out upon the canvas.

She wore a white skirt and white bodice, the dainty sleeves revealing more than half of the round, dimpled arms, which hung down and were clasped in front of her; the skirt fell full to the ankle, and the firm, well-shaped feet were bare upon the moss-grown shore; from the white cap upon her head the great braids of pale-gold hair extended below the waist line; her eyes, which were of the purple blueness of water of great depth, looked outward over the waves, and the whole face expressed subdued force and sweet seriousness. It was the portrait of a woman whose heart knew not yet the thrill of love, but had experienced the sadness of some undefined longing.

It was a matchless picture, a masterpiece of the artist's power, and, as he mixed his colours and laboured over it, but one name seemed suitable to the Canadian as he thought of Gerda. "So pure, so fresh, so cold!" he had said to himself; and when old Liof Thure first saw the painting and read the name of "The Frost-Lily," he was quick to grasp its significance and to realise what had prompted the stranger in his house to call the gem of his Norse collection by the title of the most prized and the most unattainable of the Scandinavian flora.

"It dies when they take it from the snow-bitten waters of its mountain tarns," thought the old man sadly. "Does he think to take her away from me to the country across the waters?"

But he was wise in his way and said nothing, although he could have chosen for his Gerda one of the white-skinned, serpent-eyed Northmen of her own race. Brown eyes and hair and beard did not accord with the Scandinavian ideas of freedom and manliness.

"Be a black slave!" was the old Norse curse. Gods and goddesses had light hair and a pure colour; the thralls were black; and, while the Americo-Norman has yielded up his prejudices against the brunette tinting, the delicacy of the fair skin is still a sign of better blood, a token of the free-born, in the Scandinavian peninsula.

When every detail of the picture had been made as perfect as brush and colours and the critical taste of the artist could render it, the Canadian packed up his palettes and canvasses, and bade good-bye to the snug farmhouse where he had eaten and slept and worked for so many months. When he said farewell to Gerda, it was in the presence of her father and brothers; there was a quick pressure of the hand, and he had jumped into the sledge which was waiting to speed him over the frozen snow away from his love to the nearest station of the continental trains.

That was nearly half a year ago; and through all the long months tidings had come from him but once, when he had sent a great medal of gold which the picture had taken in some famous exhibition, with the words, "Gerda, in remembrance of Ralph." And it was upon all this that Gerda was thinking, this anniversary of their meeting, as she strayed aimlessly upon the mountain slopes.

As Gerda turned to descend the hillside, a little boat darted out from the shadows of the fjord, and rowed swiftly through the long paths of silver light which the moon rays threw upon the waters. The road down the mountain so wound about that at intervals it commanded a view of the fjord, so Gerda saw the boat near the shore as she herself approached the valley. To the rower she paid little heed, simply noting that he wore the holiday costume of the Norse peasant, in scarlet and brown.

As the boat shot under the bridge, toward the pier, the man looked upward with a glad cry.

"Gerda!" said he, "Gerda, don't you know me?"

As the keel rasped upon the shore, he leaped from the boat and held his two hands out to hers.

"Dear-Eyes," he exclaimed in the Norse love-words, "do you love me?"

And what did Dear-Eyes do but nestle with a great throb of content against his heart!

"I have come straight from Montreal to you," he cried. "It is one year ago to-night since I first saw you, and I could not stay away another day. I stopped yesterday to buy this costume which is to be mine in the future, Gerda, and then I came on to you, sweetheart, to be with you always if you will have me." He paused an instant to press her head to his shoulder tenderly before he continued. "I could not ask you to leave everything that has made you what you are, and go across the seas with me. There is nothing about you that I would change for the world, and so I am come to you, Gerda. When we are married, we will live here in this pure air and amid all this grand scenery; our life shall be the same simple primitive one that has made you the woman I love. I am a Norseman hereafter for your sake!"

"Have you nothing to ask me, Dear-Eyes?" he murmured as he pressed his cheek against hers. "Have you nothing to ask me of the home or friends or family I have left?"

"No," answered Gerda, "I have you, and I love you so that there is no room for any other interest in my heart!"

Life's golden paradise opened for them, and unquestioning and content they entered in.

Two days later the following cablegram was sent to Horace Clifford, Esq., of Montreal:

"Dear Brother,—I have gathered the Frost-Lily, but shall not transplant it. When you do Europe next year, come and see us, and you shall have some of the finest salmon fishing in the world.—Always affectionately, RALPH."

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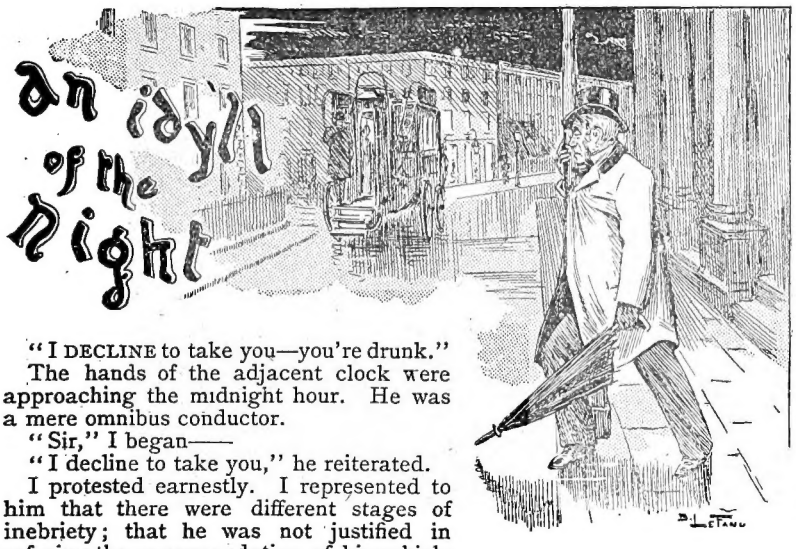

"I DECLINE to take you—you're drunk."

The hands of the adjacent clock were approaching the midnight hour. He was a mere omnibus conductor.

"Sir," I began——

"I decline to take you," he reiterated.

I protested earnestly. I represented to him that there were different stages of inebriety; that he was not justified in refusing the accommodation of his vehicle to anyone who had not achieved the maturity of intoxication. I poured forth a torrent of expostulation. In vain. Rhadamanthus on a footboard; he was inflexible. In the midst of my exhortations, he drove away, leaving me alone in the bleak, dreary solitude.

I looked round grimly. A soft rain filled the air and fell unceasingly upon the glistening asphalt. A bleary radiance invited my attention to a street lamp, and, embracing its pedestal, I suffered my thoughts to fly after the retreating vehicle, whose dark form, a fading hope, grew indistinct in the distance. I resolved to concentrate the whole efforts of my life upon the acquisition of an omnibus. "Some day," said I, "this conductor will come along and demand to be carried, while I on the footboard will defy him. And, as he lingers, then will I reveal to him the iniquity of this night." Overjoyed with this prospect, I laughed gleefully, and advanced cautiously to a doorstep that lay close by, and sat down thereon.

The contending clamour of unnumbered clocks rang forth the hour. The air seemed to grow dense and gloomy. Buildings expanded, and assumed gigantic proportions. My head grew heavy; strange shapes swept past my vision. I was in a weird and disconsolate shadowland.

A rough voice broke in upon my meditations: "Git up from there!"

looked up, and saw a tall, swarthy figure—a policeman. Making no immediate response, I caused my eye to glide over his person, from the metallic lustre of his helmet-top to the tips off his mud-splashed boots. A sense of ignominy overspread my spirit. His words fell searing and burning into my consciousness.

"What!" said I, "have we returned to the days of slavery? Am I to receive with humility the brutal insolence of an official, whom I help to clothe and feed? And this ungrateful man orders me to get up!"

Impelled by these considerations, I arose and smote him.

"Ha! would yer?" exclaimed the scion of the law, and, advancing with cautious eye, he prepared to seize me, when a young man came out of the shade and interposed himself between us.

"I believe, constable," said the young liar, "that I know this gentleman. Allow me to speak with you for a moment."

After a short pause, I beheld the retreating back of the policeman, and my deliverer approached and lifted his hat respectfully.

"Young man," said I to him severely, "the fraud that is exercised on behalf of another may seem venial to your eyes; but, in mine, the villainy of falsehood derives no palliation from the presence of disinterested motives. Go!"

In an elegant manner he explained that he had frequently seen me before, and that it would afford him the most exquisite satisfaction to be allowed to see me to my house. As he said this, the heavens opened, and a deluge descended upon our heads.

I suffered myself to be persuaded by him, and propped by his sustaining arms we began a weary pilgrimage through the rain and mist. He supported my wandering footsteps with the most anxious solicitude, and bore, with patient resignation, the moral counsels that I offered for his consideration by the way. At length, after hours of muddy travel, I saw the familiar portals of my house, and I turned to thank, in a dignified manner, the person who had aided me during my temporary indisposition.

"The lateness of the hour," said I graciously, "precludes my offering you that hospitality which perhaps you have some right to expect, but I have every reason to believe that the consciousness of having, unrewarded, performed a good action flourishes in the heart, and affords comfort and consolation under the most distressing circumstances; and I congratulate you upon having laid up a treasure of this character in the friendly help you have given me. I wish you good-night."

He stared at me in a dumfounded fashion, but not overtly regarding his expression, I sought to produce my watch as independent testimony to the reason of my observation, but found it gone. The truth flashed upon me. Under the base pretext of Good Samaritanism, this scoundrel had profited by the opportunity of my confidence to pick my pocket. "Police! police!!" I shouted. He gave one distracted look around and fled.

The door of my house opened. Lights flashed. My fair-haired daughter came bounding down the pathway to the gate, and my stern-faced better-half stood, a dismal portent of troubles to come, on the doorstep.

At this moment, a dismal object, splashed with mud from head to toe, in the grasp of two policemen, appeared on the footpath.

"My dear," I explained, "there is the unprincipled wretch who took advantage of your parent's indisposition to prosecute his rascally profession. Do not be afraid."

The group advanced towards me, and I contemplated, with satisfaction, the retribution that had overtaken this unhappy wretch in his course of infamy; and, as I did so, I perceived him make an attempt to release his throat from the grasp that encircled it, with the object, as I apprehended, of making an appeal to those sympathetic instincts, which, in greater or lesser proportions are implanted in the heart of every human being. But I resolved to disregard, upon this occasion, the promptings of a benevolent disposition, and, turning to my daughter,

"My darling," said I, "he tried to rob your poor old father. Tell your mother not to wait up for me. Ah, they are bringing in the villain!"

As I said these words, what was my stupefaction to see my daughter throw her arms around the neck of the malefactor, and to discover, at the same time, my gold hunter in my coat-tail pocket! I stood aghast. Clearly, when my watch was in my pocket, the man in the clutches of the constables had not stolen it, unless, by some miraculous light-fingeredness, he had placed it there. But my daughter—how on earth? What reckless immodesty prompted the embrace? I stared at everybody! Who would explain to me?

"Henry," wailed my daughter, "what *does* this mean?"

* * * *

If vice were incapable of assuming the guise of innocence, this world would have no cause for the assistance of a numerous and able-minded legal profession. I freely admit a mistake in the character and motives of the youth who protected me from the onslaught of a vicious constable. It appears he is my daughter's accepted suitor, and the son of my old friend Jenkins.

It is true I had other views for her, but an earnest attachment is touching to the feelings of a parent, and without much solicitation I bestowed upon them my blessing and consent.

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THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR.

By George Griffith,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Syren of the Skies," etc.

SUMMARY—PROLOGUE.

Max Renault, the leading spirit of the anarchist "Autonomie Group No. 7" meets his colleagues in a club near the Caledonian Road on the eve of President Carnot's assassination. He shoots a traitor who has almost betrayed the Group, and so saved Carnot's life. Then he tells them that he is about to emigrate with a society of Socialists, one of whom, Frederick Austen, a wealthy engineer, who has been converted to Socialism, takes out with him a working model of an aerial vessel which is to enable the colonists to enforce a reign of peace on earth. This air-ship Renault determines to steal when complete, and use for the purpose of bringing about an Anarchist reign of terror instead. Meanwhile, Franz Hartog, another member of the Group, is to carry out a plot he has formed to steal a very fast torpedo boat destroyer, which is to be built at Elbing for the Russian Government, and with her to levy blackmail on the Atlantic, and so raise funds to build an Anarchist aerial fleet when the time comes.

CHAPTER I.

Utopia in the South.

On the 21st of November, 1898, the *Calypso*, a steam yacht, rigged as a three-masted schooner and measuring between four and five hundred tons, met with a rather serious accident to her engines in one of those brief but deadly hurricanes which are known to navigators of the South Seas as "southerly busters."

They are the white squalls of the South, and woe betide the unhappy ship that they strike unawares. Over the smooth, sunlit waters there drifts with paralysing rapidity a mass of hissing, seething billows, churned into foam and then beaten down again by the terrific force of the wind that is roaring above them. Often there is not a breath or a puff of air felt by the ship until the squall strikes her, and then the blow falls like the united stroke of a hundred battering-rams.

If the ship is stripped and ready for the blow, she heels over till the water spurts in through the lee scupper holes and half the deck is awash. If there is a rag of sail on stay or yard, there is a bang like the report of a duck-gun, and, if you have quick eyes, you may see it flying away to leeward like a bit of tissue paper before the gale, and, if it has not yielded with sufficient readiness to the shock of the storm, a sprung topmast or a snapped yard will pay the penalty of resistance.

Meanwhile, what was a few minutes ago a smoothly-shining sea, scarcely ruffled by a ripple, is now a white, boiling, mass of swiftly rising billows, amidst which the straining, struggling vessel fights for her life like some stricken animal.

In company with his sister Violet.

It had been thus with the *Calypso*. A stout new fore-staysail that had been hoisted in the hope of getting her head before the squall had been struck square and had resisted just a moment too long at the cost of a sprung fore-topmast. Then, an effort to bring her round with the screw had resulted in the disaster that practically crippled her.

A big sea came rolling up astern, her nose went down and her stern went up, her propeller whirling in the air, and, before the engine could be stopped, there came a grinding, thrashing noise in the engine-room, and, a moment later, the yacht was drifting helplessly away before the storm with a broken crankshaft.

When this happened, the *Calypso* was on a voyage from New Zealand to the Marquesas Islands, between four and five hundred miles to the north-east of Auckland. The screw had been hoisted out of the water and a spare fore-topmast fitted; but only five days after this had been done she was caught in a heavy gale from the south westward and got so badly knocked about that when every spare spar on board had been used in refitting her she could only carry sail enough to take her at four or five knots an hour before a good topsail breeze.

The result of this double misfortune was that a month later she was still on the southern verge of the tropics, beating about in light baffling winds, unable to make her way into the region of the South-east trades.

The *Calypso* was owned and sailed by Sir Harry Milton, of Seaton Abbey, Northumberland, landowner and ironmaster, who rather less than three years before had come of age and entered upon his inheritance of broad acres, mines, and ironworks, which yielded him an income not far short of £30,000 a year, and in addition to these a comfortable nest-egg of nearly half a million in hard cash and good securities.

For the last year and a half, he had been seeing the world in the pleasantest of all fashions—cruising about from port to port, and ocean to ocean, in his yacht, in company with his sister Violet, a pretty, healthy, high-bred brunette between eighteen and nineteen.

Sir Harry, himself, was a good specimen of the typical English gentleman, standing about five feet ten in his deck shoes, well built, broad shouldered, ruddy-skinned and clear eyed, with features that were frank and pleasing in their open manliness, rather than strictly handsome, and yet saved from mediocrity by that undefinable, yet unmistakable, stamp of good breeding which distinguishes, as was once wittily if somewhat cynically said, the man who has a grandfather from the man who only had progenitors.

Apart from the officers and crew of the *Calypso* there was only one member of the yacht's company who needs introduction in special terms. This was Herbert Wyndham, second lieutenant of Her Majesty's gunboat *Sandfly*, an old schoolfellow and bosom friend of Sir Harry's, and just now on a year's invalid leave in consequence of a nasty bullet wound received in storming a stronghold of a West African slaver chieftain, at the head of his blue-jackets. Sir Harry had picked him up at Cape Town, when he was beginning to get about again after the fever that had followed on his wound, and, with his sister's assistance, he succeeded without much difficulty in persuading him to spend the rest of his leave on a cruise to the South Seas in the *Calypso*.

In person, Lieutenant Wyndham was a well set-up, clean-limbed young fellow of twenty-six, with a good-humoured face and bright hazel eyes, which looked alertly out from under a square strong forehead that matched the firm chin which, according to the modern fashion of naval officers, was clothed with a close-clipped, neatly-trimmed beard a shade or so lighter than the close, curly chestnut hair that formed not the least of his personal attractions.

As week after week passed, and neither land nor sail appeared in sight from the decks of the half-crippled yacht, Sir Harry began to feel a little natural anxiety for the ultimate safety of his beautiful craft and of those near and dear to him on board her. Another such a squall or a gale as she had already suffered from would almost infallibly wreck her in her present state, and both he and his sailing master would have been glad to reach even the shelter of a coral lagoon, within which she could take refuge until she could be thoroughly overhauled in a fashion that was not possible out in the open sea.

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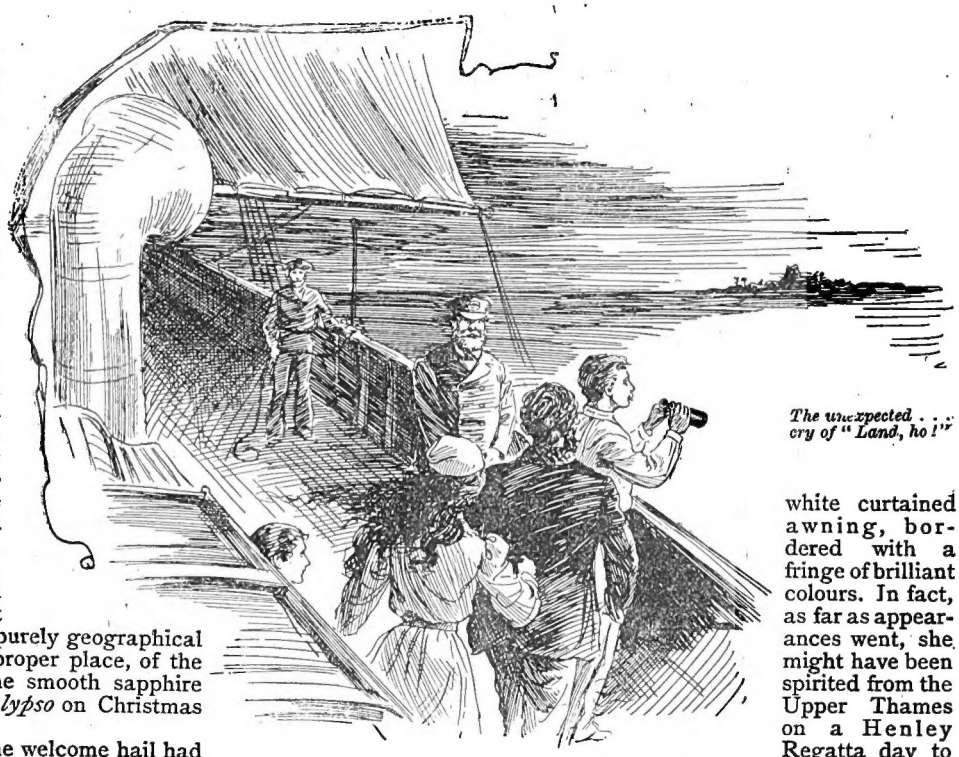

The unexpected . . . cry of "Land, ho!"

But most things have an end—even calms in the South Pacific—and by Christmas Eve the *Calypso* had at last crept out of the zone of calms and had begun to feel the first fitful puffs of the trade winds. Then, about an hour before sunrise on Christmas morning, the unexpected, but none the less welcome, cry of "Land, ho!" brought everyone, from Sir Harry himself to his sister's maid, or the "Lady-in-Waiting," as Lieutenant Wyndham was wont to call her, tumbling out of their berths and up on deck.

No one who has not seen the sun rise over an island in the South Pacific can form any adequate idea of the scene that greeted the eyes of the crew of the *Calypso*, as the light broadened and brightened to the eastward in front of them. The island paradises of the South Sea are like no other part of the earth. Their beauty is entirely their own. No word-painting can ever do full justice to it, and the reader must therefore fain be content with the purely geographical description, which will follow in its proper place, of the island that was seen rising out of the smooth sapphire sea from the poop-deck of the *Calypso* on Christmas morning, 1898.

In less than half an hour after the welcome hail had run along the deck, Sir Harry and the sailing-master were eagerly scanning the land, now about ten miles distant, through their glasses.

"What do you make it, Mr. Topline?" asked Sir Harry, after a good long stare at the mysterious land, taking his binoculars from his eyes and looking at the old salt with a puzzled expression.

"I can't say, Sir Harry. I've never seen the island before, and I don't believe it's down on the chart. You see, we've got clean out of the track of the trading vessels and mail steamers, and this part of the South Sea is even now very little known. I'd no idea there was land within three hundred miles of us," replied the sailing-master.

"No, it's not on the chart, for I was following Mr. Martin yesterday when he was pricking off the course, and there was nothing near us. Confound the wind! There it goes to a dead calm again. Hullo, what the deuce is that?"

As he spoke Sir Harry jumped, glass in hand, on to the rail that ran round the flush deck of the yacht, climbed half-a-dozen rounds into the main-shrouds, and again levelled his glasses in the direction of the island. A moment later he sang out to the sailing master:

"Topline, what do you say to a steam launch coming off from your unknown island?"

"A steam launch! Well, I'll be kicked if it isn't," said the other, mounting the opposite rail and focussing the approaching craft. "It must be the steam tender of some man-o'-war surveying the island or getting fruit and water, only she's got no funnel, and I don't——. Why, she's going twenty knots an hour through the water if she's going a yard! She's no man-o'-war tender, not she!"

All eyes on board the *Calypso* were now turned on the strange craft, which, by this time, had cleared the reef and was coming speeding towards them over the smooth, windless sea at a pace which proved that, whatever her motive power was, it lacked nothing on the score of efficiency. In less than half-an-hour, she was describing a wide curve round the stern of the yacht, preparatory to running up alongside.

It was at once evident that the sailing master had been quite wrong in his first guess that she was the steam tender of a man-of-war. She was a ten or twelve tonner, long, narrow, and low-lying, white painted, with a bright gold stripe from stem to stern, and covered, fore and aft, with a snowy white curtained awning, bordered with a fringe of brilliant colours. In fact, as far as appearances went, she might have been spirited from the Upper Thames on a Henley Regatta day to the distant and lonely region of the South Sea, out of which were now rising the high bluffs and green slopes of the unknown island whence she had come.

As she came up alongside the *Calypso*, a youth of about eighteen, who was standing at the wheel amidships, hailed the yacht in English and wished the new comers, "A Merry Christmas!" in a tone which left not the slightest doubt as to his nationality. Sir Harry returned the greeting as heartily as it was given, wondering not a little, like the rest of his shipmates, not only at the presence of such a dainty little craft in such out-of-the-way waters, but also at the strange contrast between the manner and language of the youth who had hailed him, and his entirely uncivilised appearance—uncivilised, that is to say, from the stand-point of modern fashion.

His bearing and speech were those of a well-educated and cultured young gentleman at the latter end of the nineteenth century, but his dress was more like that of a Phœnician mariner of a thousand years ago. His long, brown hair fell in curls on his broad shoulders and clustered thickly about his smooth forehead, held back from his bronzed, handsome face by a narrow fillet of metal that looked like polished aluminium

His dress consisted of a long over-tunic of soft grey woollen cloth, bordered with cunningly-worked embroidery in blue silk, open at the neck, where it showed a white linen close-fitting under vest, and confined at the waist by a red silk sash, wound two or three times round, and hanging in heavily fringed ends over his left hip. A pair of soft, yellow leather moccasins, beautifully worked in many-coloured threads and bead embroidery, covered his feet, and came half way up the calves of his bare, muscular legs.

"What craft is that and where do you hail from?" asked Sir Harry, some dim notion of pirates associating itself in his mind with the somewhat fantastic attire of the youth at the helm.

"This is the electric launch *Mermaid*, and yonder island is Utopia," he replied. "We came out to see if we could be of any assistance to you. You seem to have had rather a bad time of it somewhere by the look of your spars."

On hearing this queer, though kindly expressed, reply, Sir Harry began to think that the *Calypso* must have drifted out of the realms of reality and into the regions of romance, for the

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only Utopia he had ever heard of had been Sir Thomas More's Nowhere. But good manners forbade any expression of surprise or incredulity, and so he answered laughingly:

"I had no idea that a Utopia existed on earth in these degenerate days, but I am delighted to learn that I am wrong, and I'm also much obliged to you for coming out to us. We've disabled our engines and got our spars badly knocked about. But won't you come on board and let us introduce ourselves?"

"Thank you, if you'll throw me a rope I will. Never mind the gangway ladder. Here, Tom, take the wheel, and don't let those girls run away with you."

"That's just what he'd like us to do," came in the laughing tones of a girl's voice from under the forward awning as the young fellow caught the rope and swung himself lightly over the *Calypso's* rail.

"I didn't know you had ladies on board," said Sir Harry, meeting him at the gangway and holding out his hand, "if I had known I would not have hailed you so unceremoniously."

"There are no ladies in Utopia, and the Utopians dislike ceremony very much, so it's just as well you didn't," replied the youth with a laugh as he took Sir Harry's hand.

Three pretty long-haired girls.

"But surely that was a young lady's voice I heard just now, and a very sweet one too, if I heard aright."

"Well, it was a girl's voice, certainly. There are three of them on board the *Mermaid*, but they wouldn't like to be called young ladies. There are only women and girls in Utopia. We left the ladies behind in England."

He checked himself rather abruptly as his eyes met Violet's gazing in frankly undisguised astonishment at him. Then with a slight flush on his cheeks he went on:

"But pardon me, I had better introduce myself instead of talking about our manners and customs, which I daresay you will learn before long. I am Frank Markham, skipper of the *Mermaid*, and her crew is at present composed of Tom Harris, Ralf Smith, Lucy Summers, Annie Hilton, and Dora Merton, the girl who made a very true remark about Master Tom as I came on board."

As young Markham said this he went to the side and sang out:

"Come now, Mermaids, show yourselves! I want to introduce you to our visitors. By the way, you have not told me your names yet," he continued, turning to Sir Harry.

"My name is Harry Milton; I am owner and skipper of the *Calypso*. This is my sister, Violet, this is Lieutenant Wyndham, of Her Majesty's ship *Sandfly*, and this is Mr. Topline, my sailing master."

As Sir Harry made the introductions in turn the curtains which ran round the fore-deck of the launch were drawn aside, disclosing three pretty long-haired girls, picturesquely, if somewhat lightly attired, in gay tunics and cloaks and long moccasins, profusely ornamented with many-coloured silken embroidery, fringes, and curiously worked clasps and armlets of lustrous white and yellow metal. Instinctively every man who was looking over the bulwarks of the *Calypso* raised his hat or his cap as the three girls, half gravely, half shyly, returned the salutes from the deck of the yacht.

"And now, what can we do for you?" asked Markham when this little ceremony was over. "I suppose you want to get into port and refit as soon as possible?"

"That's just what I do want to do very badly," replied Sir Harry. "But where am I to find a port and a dockyard in this part of the Pacific?"

"Both are within less than a half-a-dozen miles of us, and the *Mermaid* shall tow you in in an hour if you will first oblige me with five minutes' conversation in private."

"Certainly, come into my cabin," said Sir Harry, leading the way to the companion.

In less than ten minutes they returned, Sir Harry looking just a trifle mystified, and without loss of time a light hawser was got out and made fast to the *Mermaid*, and the two vessels began to move smoothly towards the white reef in the distance, fringing the hitherto unknown Island of Utopia.

CHAPTER II.

GOING INTO PORT.

It took a little over an hour for the *Mermaid* to tow the *Calypso* from where she had lain becalmed into the lagoon of Utopia. As the yacht approached the island it rapidly became manifest that, whether chance or design had guided the Utopians in the selection of their far-away home, they had had the good fortune to choose a spot that well deserved to be called beautiful, even in that part of the world where land and sea and sky seem to conspire to wear their brightest and most beautiful aspects.

They were approaching it from the West, and before they reached it the sun had risen above the horizon, and against the flood of light that blazed along the Eastern horizon they saw, standing out clear and sharp, the truncated cone of an extinct volcano, which raised itself in lonely grandeur between four and five thousand feet above the sea. From the middle slopes to north and south two curving ranges of hills, sparsely timbered at their summits, but with their sides clothed with ever denser and more luxuriant vegetation, ran out to the south-east and north-west, gradually decreasing in height until they terminated abruptly in cliffs of naked rock which rose eight or nine hundred feet sheer up from the water.

Between these two headlands lay a wide irregular bay fronted by the broad expanse of brilliant emerald-green water and backed by verdant slopes which, clothed with all the wonderful vegetation of the Southern tropics, rose and fell valley behind valley and hill beyond hill until they merged in the distance with the heights of the volcano and its attendant chains.

"That is Mount Plato," said Markham, who at Sir Harry's invitation had remained on board the yacht to act as cicerone to the visitors to Utopia. "We call it that because under its shadow we hope to found our New Republic."

"But isn't the Republic founded yet?" asked Violet. "If you'll allow me to say so I should have thought it was not only founded but had reached a considerable height of prosperity."

"Yes," chimed in Wyndham, with a movement of his hand towards the *Mermaid*. "If twenty-knot electric launches are not a sign of a fairly prosperous civilisation, I can hardly see what would be."

"Twenty knots!" laughed Markham. "Why the *Mermaid* can run thirty when we're in a hurry, and we've got a three-thousand tonner on the slips now in the dockyard that we are building on a new principle, and which we expect to make forty."

"Whew," whistled Wyndham, lifting his eyebrows in undisguised astonishment. "Forty knots! If you can build vessels like that you Utopians ought to be millionaires to a man. Why, there isn't a European Government that wouldn't willingly give you half a million apiece for as many of them as you could turn out.

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The truncated cone of an extinct volcano.

"Our own Admiralty is perhaps the most thick-headed institution of its kind under the sun; but I believe even it would give me a good deal for the secret of a ship like that, if you would let me take it home with me."

Instead of replying directly Markham looked at Sir Harry, who at once took the hint and said, with a shake of his head:

"No, Wyndham, I'm afraid there's no chance of that or anything of the kind. In fact," he said, "I may as well tell you, and you gentlemen also," he continued, with a glance at the sailing master and his chief mate, "that I have accepted the invitation to put into Utopia on the sole condition on which it was given, and I have pledged my word of honour for myself and everyone on board the yacht that no attempt will be made to learn anything that is not freely told to us, and even that if we learn anything by accident we will behave both here and at home as though we had never known it.

"You see, we have not the slightest right to pry into the secrets or discoveries of our hosts, and I'm sure you will agree with me that in giving such a pledge I was making the least return I could for the kindness and assistance that I'm sure we shall receive on shore."

"Oh, quite so, quite so!" said the lieutenant. "Of course, I was only joking. A man would deserve to be shot who did a caddish thing like that. Still, just now, you know, a forty-knot ship properly armed would be simply invaluable, not only to an individual nation like ourselves, but to the civilised world at large. You know what I mean."

"Ah, yes!" replied Sir Harry, his face becoming grave in an instant. "You mean to chase that brute with the red flag and hunt him down to wherever his lair is. Yes, a ship that could do that would be cheap at a couple of millions, and I believe Europe would subscribe the money to buy it in a week, even if the Governments couldn't find it. I'd give ten thousand myself with pleasure."

"Pardon me," said Markham, turning round from the rail where he had been standing pointing out the different features of the island to Violet, while Sir Harry was speaking. "But that sounds almost like a modern edition of one of the old pirate stories. Surely you don't mean to say that there are any pirates nowadays, either with black or red flags?"

"I am sorry to say that there is at least one?" said Sir Harry, "and he can do more damage in a month than all the old pirates put together could have done in a year."

"What a villainous shame!" said Markham, looking for the moment graver and sterner than they would have thought possible. "That will be news for them ashore if you care to tell them the story. In fact, I'm afraid we shall put a considerable tax on your generosity in that way, for we haven't had any news from the outer world for quite twelve months now.

"But here we are at the entrance to the lagoon. What do you think of it? Don't you think our Utopia is a lovely land?"

"Lovely, indeed!" said Violet, who, during the conversation, had been looking about her with all her eyes, as though she could never get enough of the beauty of the scene. "I've heard and read all sorts of stories about the Pacific Islands, but I couldn't have believed that anything earthly could have been so beautiful as this."

And truly the scene that was visible from the bridge of the *Calypso* on which they were now standing was worthy of the enthusiasm of her words. Every colour that Nature uses in painting her incomparable landscapes was here, either blended or contrasted to produce the most exquisite effects.

On land were mingled a hundred tints of green and gold, from the sombre hues of the banyan leaves to the golden ears of the patches of corn that were ripening on the upper hill slopes; trees and shrubs of every shape and height succeeded each other, from the lowly bananas to the towering palms and the splendid pines that crowned the higher summits of the mountain ranges, and, high above all, the bare blue-grey cone of the volcano rose to crown a picture which no words could adequately describe.

But when, to the medley of hill and vale, mountain rock and ravine, presented by the island itself, were added the snowy white of the billows breaking on the long reef—which, save for one narrow opening, stretched from point to point across the bay—the emerald-green of the lagoon inside it, and, outside, the deep blue of the open ocean reflecting the sapphire of the cloudless sky, the picture became almost unearthly in its strange and varied loveliness.

The roar of the tumbling billows upon the reef sounded louder and louder in the ears of the *Calypso's* company as the *Mermaid* and her charge ran in towards the opening.

"I think I had better take your wheel now," said Markham to Sir Harry when they were within about five hundred yards of the reef. "This is rather a ticklish piece of steering for anyone who doesn't know the currents."

"I should think so," said Wyndham, looking ahead as Markham went and took the wheel from the sailor who was steering. "I know I wouldn't care about the job of bringing a torpedo boat in here in the dark. Why, there doesn't seem to be much more than sixty feet of clear water to get through. If this place were properly defended it could be held against all the navies of Europe as long as they chose to stop here."

"Yes," laughed Sir Harry, "especially with one or two forty-knot cruisers dodging about outside and making a judicious distribution of torpedoes. What do you think, Topline?"

"I think, Sir Harry," growled the old salt, "that I'll believe in forty-knot cruisers when I sees 'em. If a speed like that's possible, why can't all the Governments of Europe, with all their money, build a cruiser that'll catch that craft, whatever she is, that's been playing up old Scratch among the Atlantic liners, according to the news we got at Sydney?"

"Because they don't know how," said Markham, without turning his head, "and because there are some secrets that money won't buy."

"Don't you think our Utopia is a lovely land?"

As he spoke he gave the yacht's wheel a turn and swung her about four points to port in imitation of a similar manœuvre of the *Mermaid*, which was apparently running dead on to the reef. Within fifty yards of the white water the *Mermaid* shot across into the seething foam, doubled sharply, and ran to starboard at right-angles to the yacht. This

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brought a strain upon the hawser, and, as it came up dripping out of the water and tightened, Wyndham could not repress an exclamation of surprise.

"That's queer towing; what on earth is she doing that for?"

"You'll see in a moment," said Markham, giving a spin to the wheel and swinging the yacht round after the launch. By the tenseness of the rope it was evident that the *Mermaid* was pulling very hard upon it. The *Calypso* came round, and then her stern swung with a rush into the swirling white water that was boiling about the narrow entrance.

Then, while the party on the bridge watched with barely concealed anxiety the breakers which every moment brought nearer until they were roaring only a stone's throw away, the line slackened slightly, and just as the sailing master, unable to contain himself any longer sang out: "She'll be on the reef in a minute! Tell the launch to tow harder, man; can't you see she's going?" the foaming, tossing mass of breakers suddenly seemed to slide away ahead, and a minute later the *Calypso* had drifted through the opening stern first, and was floating motionless on the smooth glittering water of the lagoon, with the *Mermaid* lying a few yards ahead of her.

"There's a twelve-knot current coming round the corner of that reef," said Markham, leaving the wheel and turning to the sailing master. "You could no more tow a disabled ship through there than you could tow her over the reef itself. The only way to get the yacht in was to let her drift in—with a proper check on her, of course."

"I beg your pardon, young gentleman," said Topline, looking just a bit crestfallen. "I was wrong, and you were right. You know the place, and I don't; and I'll be hanged if I could have got her in myself."

Saw the wall of rock open into a vast arch.

The *Mermaid* now got under weigh again and began to tow the *Calypso* across the lagoon towards the high bluffs at the southern arm of the bay. The bright smooth water of the bay was already dotted by dozens of pretty little craft, some canoes with outriggers, some double-hulled catamarans with great white sails that swept them along at a famous pace, others canoes of the shape seen on the Canadian lakes and rivers, and others again just such craft as you may see any summer's day on the Thames between Putney and Richmond, large roomy row-boats, slim outriggers, and broad, flat centre-boards, with their wide spread of snowy canvas.

All came racing away with the land breeze from the head of the bay, where half a dozen jetties ran out into the water, and where, behind the snowy coral beach, the verdant shore was dotted with white houses peeping out from shady groves of lime and orange trees and spreading tree-ferns above which the stately palms lifted their gently waving crests a hundred feet into the air.

The *Calypso* was soon surrounded by the light-heeled craft, and many a greeting of welcome was waved to the new comers by their gaily dressed crews, and, thus escorted, the yacht was towed to the bluffs. It looked as though the *Mermaid* was going to run her nose up against the huge frowning wall of rock that rose hundreds of feet above her, but within a couple of hundred yards of their base Markham went to the wheel again.

The launch swerved to port, and as he sent the *Calypso* after her those on her bridge saw the wall of rock open into a vast arch, the apex of which was over two hundred feet from the water. They glided through this for a distance of about fifty yards, and then the half light of the tunnel gave place to the bright sunlight again, and they found themselves floating in a perfectly land-locked oval basin about a mile long by about three-quarters of a mile broad, and closed in on all sides by perpendicular cliffs rising sheer from the water to heights varying from eighty to a hundred and fifty feet.

"Here we are at last!" said Markham. "This is the dockyard of Utopia, and in a couple of hours your yacht shall be on the slips in the dry dock; meanwhile, if you will come on board the *Mermaid* with me, we will go ashore."

(To be continued next week.)

THE OLD GUIDE

IN the Place des Thermes, at Luques-de-Born, the delightful, well-known watering-place, an old man was to be met every day tottering slowly along. He wore the picturesque costume of a guide—a suit of black velvet, a blue woollen cap and a red belt. He carried a long iron-tipped staff; from his side hung a leathern bottle, and on his back an axe and a ball of rope. His shrunken breast bore a shining plate displaying his name and title, "Auguste Lagnerot, Guide of the First Class."

His laborious gait indicated an age of at least seventy years. He strolled about among the tourists, saluting them respectfully, but no one desired his services.

In his youth Auguste Lagnerot had been one of the most intrepid and valued guides of Luques-de-Born. He was the first to conduct the excursionists to the magnificent valley of Arbelles, whose lakes, glaciers and cascades are now the admiration of strangers.

From that picturesque valley he had discovered a path by which, in five hours after leaving Luques, the famous peak of the Lion-Blanc, previously reputed inaccessible, could be reached.

In those days Auguste Lagnerot was a robust, sinewy young fellow, a favourite of the ladies who climbed among the glaciers. Passionately fond of mountain scenery, he had eyes only for the waterfalls, the stretches of snow, the chaos of rocks, the marvellous and changing scenes of nature among which he lived.

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From June to October daily for twenty-five years he had guided the tourists from his valley of Arbelles to his peak of the Lion-Blanc. Every scene of interest was proudly pointed out by him with an enthusiasm and delight ever fresh and inexhaustible.

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At that period Lagnerot earned fifteen francs a day and his travelling expenses—meals, lodgings, and tolls. But he

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would have esteemed the pleasure of reviewing the lakes, cascades, and glaciers an adequate compensation. And in the winter, when Luques slept like a dead city in the shroud of its white mountains, Lagnerot sometimes revisited his valley of Arbelles and endeavoured, notwithstanding the danger, to climb the snowy crest of the Lion-Blanc.

At fifty years of age he fell sick, and was confined to his bed for several months. His convalescence covered nearly four years, and when he was able to put in an appearance again in the Place des Thermes, he had become so old, and bent, and feeble, that his vigour did not inspire confidence, and he was no longer employed.

His illness had ruined him. He lived abstemiously with a nephew, who kept a furnished house in the suburbs of Luques, and the old guide never had enough money to undertake, at his own expense, the ascent of the Lion-Blanc.

Like many persons advanced in life, he was deceived regarding his powers, and continued placidly to wear his costume of a guide, hoping every summer day to find some tourist in need of his assistance. Auguste Lagnerot became an inoffensive monomaniac, whom everybody respected, and whose history was soon learned by strangers.

He constantly saw the guides, his successors, leave in charge of the excursionists; he looked from afar with melancholy eyes on the arid, snow-capped mountain at the further end of the valley; then, with shortened steps, and rounded back, and disheartened mien, his thin hair streaming in the breeze, he sought a photographer's window and scanned with pleasure the views of the glaciers, cascades, and peaks, all the objects which he loved so well, and which, no doubt, he would never see again.

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One day in September, close on his seventy-sixth year, he perceived a young couple approaching.

"Monsieur Lagnerot," said the gentleman, "can you conduct my wife and me to the valley of Arbelles and the peak of the Lion-Blanc to-morrow and the day after?"

The old guide drew himself erect and grew somewhat pale. Was he dreaming? What a time had elapsed since he last heard a similar question!

"Certainly, sir," he replied firmly, striving to hide the trembling of his hand on the iron-tipped staff.

The hour and the price of the excursion were agreed on, and after arranging that he should call for them at their hotel on the morrow at mid-day, they took leave of him politely.

The gentleman and lady had not long been married and having already made the excursion three times, and learned the story of the old guide, had a sentimental fancy to take him to the Lion-Blanc, under pretext of going under his charge.

The good man suspected nothing and at the appointed hour presented himself to take charge of the party. It was a fine day, and they started on the journey. Lagnerot, brushed up and carefully arrayed, held out well for the first hour. He was full of zeal, and the couple had some difficulty to keep up.

He pursued his former route, following the course of the Nivette, the resounding and foaming torrent which resembled a white-skirted little girl frisking in the meadows.

He arrived at the ruins of Castillon. As in former days, he stretched out his left arm, and said:

"The valley of Aurin!"

Then he pointed with his right hand, and exclaimed:

"The peak of the Crabère!"

His voice trembled with emotion; his eyes gleamed with pleasure; his cheeks reddened beneath their wrinkles.

He was still able to indicate the sombre gulf where the Nivette disappeared like a shifting diver. He hurried through the zig-zags of the slope, bent on exhibiting the precipice where the three Englishmen were killed; then drank deeply at the shaded spring where he had so often quenched his thirst.

When he resumed the route, and clambered up the steep ascent, he endeavoured, as in the days of old, to assist the lady; and it was really she who was the prop, and the gentleman following pressed against him while pretending to be seeking support for himself. The old guide did not perceive their intention.

"Courage, courage!" he exclaimed in a broken voice once and again to his companions. "Now then, one more effort and we're there."

He wiped his brow bravely, and did not stop too long to take breath.

They succeeded in hoisting him to the plateau, and as the sun set they debouched between the two rocks of basalt on the valley of Arbelles.

Lagnerot was so happy that he felt tempted to fall on his knees and kiss the ground. Oh, to see the Lac Bleu again! and the Chevelure de la Vierge, and the Ville-d'Enfer, the sparkling glaciers, the many-coloured peaks above which the Lion-Blanc reared its snowy crest!

He explained it all in a husky tone, trying to make gestures of admiration with his wasted fingers. Behind him the couple stood smiling, gratified to witness his enjoyment.

He was served with dinner at the inn by the side of the lake and provided with a good bed.

Rising at dawn, Lagnerot, as soon as dressed, went to wake the tourists, according to the custom of the guides. But the couple had already risen and were chatting together.

Lagnerot heard the husband say:

"Shall we take him up? You know it will be more fatiguing than yesterday. Perhaps we'll have to drag him all the way!"

The lady laughed out, "Poor old man!"

Lagnerot was startled. At first he could not fully comprehend. He crossed his trembling hands on his staff and stood with open mouth. He tried to think, to ponder, to recollect; but his brain was almost as incapable as his limbs. The reality gradually dawned on his mind as he looked at his wrists, which were quivering on the staff, and on his limbs, which seemed ready to give way beneath him. Almost stupefied, he fetched a deep sigh and turned back slowly without knocking at the door.

Shortly afterwards, the couple found him seated by the side of the blue lake, gazing up on the rose-tinted mountain tops.

"Well, Monsieur Lagnerot," they said. "Aren't we going to the peak? There's no time to lose if we are to return to Luques this evening."

The old guide shook his head and remained silent.

They did not insist, but left him alone, after instructing the innkeeper to take good care of him until their return.

Lagnerot remained on the spot. Dipping his hand in the icy water of the lake flowing between the rocks, he moistened his brow, and sat with eyes riveted on the rising sun.

At ten o'clock the innkeeper invited him to table, but he declined. He neither ate nor drank. He wandered away to the Chevelure de la Vierge, and was pleased to feel a little of the cold spray from the rocks striking his face.

At two o'clock the young travellers found him cold and unconscious. They covered him with wraps and gave him a stimulant.

He regained consciousness, looked at the two for a moment, and then closed his eyes. But he opened them shortly after, smiling in his tears.

"Pardon!" he stammered; "but you are so good! Yes, very good to contrive to give me this pleasure! If you believe in God, let me tell you that I shall pray for you every day until my death."

He rose and walked behind them, accepting their arms in the difficult places of the descent, and was able, the same evening, to reach Luques-de-Born.

The husband slipped two louis, the price of the excursion, in Lagnerot's vest pocket at the moment when the old man turned round to take a final look at the Lion Blanc.

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From that day the old guide put aside his velvet suit, his iron-tipped staff and his shining medal. He was seen at times wandering about the streets, but in appearance he was ten years older and scarcely ever spoke. He was almost blind, and seemed to be deaf, resembling a lifeless body which still moved slightly, but whose soul had made the ascent to the valley of his youth, to rest in sight of the resplendent peaks and the eternal snows at the foot of the Chevelure de la Vierge.

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IRISH MARY

A STORY OF THE SEPOY MUTINY.

IT was in the early days of the Sepoy Mutiny, and the revolt had already begun.

At little Flutterhabad, a small government depôt occupied by companies of the Sixth, one of the Inverary Rifles, and a battalion of native foot, under Captains Donaldson and Clare, though but thirty miles from Delhi, they were unconscious of any danger till, two days before, a messenger on horseback arrived at the cantonment with a note from the officer in command of the neighbouring town of Susi, informing Captain Donaldson that some of the sepoys there had raised cries of disaffection, that a large body of mutineers were reported as marching on the place, and, therefore, the officers of the Sixth were implored to start with all speed, and with whatever force they could muster, to intercept these latter, as, were they once to coalesce with the disaffected within the walls, the lives of the English would in all probability be the sacrifice. No time was lost in complying with the appeal contained in this dispatch, and the senior captain thought himself showing extraordinary prudence in deciding not to take the native battalion, in which, however, he had full confidence.

The regiment marched out of Flutterhabad an hour before sundown, leaving behind it, besides the soldiers' wives and children and the civilians, an English sergeant and ten men to overawe (!) the native troops; also the young wife of Captain Clare, with her little baby two weeks old.

The overpowering heat, dust, and noise of the dirty little town had so affected Mrs. Clare, in her delicate state of health, that her husband had moved her to a deserted mosque, about a quarter of a mile distant from the depôt, and which, standing in a garden thickly overgrown with palms and tulip trees, made a pleasant sort of improvised bungalow for the invalid.

The fierce day had faded into evening at last, the evening of the day after the departure of the troops, and Mrs. Clare lay on her couch, her ayah squatted on the floor beside her, with the infant in her arms, and the punkah waving with monotonous regularity over her head, being pulled to and fro by a servant seated in the verandah outside. The croaking of the frogs could be heard distinctly from the pool in the deserted garden below, mingling with the sharp "cheep, cheep" of the lizards, and an occasional murmur from the cantonment, or the shrill "ta-ra" of the bugle for supper; but it was not to these customary sounds that Mrs. Clare was listening as she leaned rather forward on her elbow.

"What can it be?" she said at last. "Don't you hear it, Zeena? Can it be the Sixth returning?"

"The mem sahib is feverish. Zeena hear nossing at all; and de sahib Clare and de Sixth not go to come back till to-morrow."

"But we were to have heard from them to-day, and there has been no message. Could anything have happened to him? Oh, no, not that! And yet it is so strange, no one coming near me this evening, not even Mrs. Smyth, as she promised or—there, Zeena, you must hear *that*.

"That" was audible enough indeed—a cry from the cantonment something between a shriek and a shout, and followed by a confused hum of many voices.

"Soldier got bhang—drunk—mad," said Zeena lazily. "Sergeant put him in black-hole."

"It is news of some sort from the regiment. Zeena, give me the baby, and run up to the cantonment and see what it is; and ask Mrs. Smyth to come back and stay the night with me. Make haste, run." And as the lady clapped her hands impatiently, Zeena rose with the silent docility of her class, and, only waiting to lay the infant by its mother, and place a tumbler of cooling drink beside her, sped swiftly through the low, arched doorway, and disappeared into the darkness.

Left alone, Mrs. Clare's anxiety increased. The strange rolling sound was now plainly distinguishable from the measured tramp of soldiers, and that some great excitement was going on at the cantonment was more and more evident. Once a shrill cry rose faintly into the air. Then came the sharp clang of a bell as suddenly suppressed, and yet no thought of danger there or to herself crossed her.

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A step aroused her. A quick, noisy step coming nearer every moment. Was it her husband? No, that was no smooth, military tread, but a woman's; and not the smooth, cat-like fall of the Hindoo, but one flying up the garden walk with frantic, almost clumsy, haste; another moment, and there was a clatter on the marble steps; another, and the heavy cloth curtain draping the arched doorway was roughly torn aside, and a young woman, with a sun-burnt, freckled face, hung round with tangled, reddish elf-locks, and lit by a pair of laughing blue eyes, bare arms hugging something like a dingy bundle of rags to her bosom, herself clad in similar rags of divers hues, badly covered by an old plaid cloak, thrust herself into Mrs. Clare's dainty presence—the girl, nick-named "Irish Mary," wife of a soldier in the Sixth, and a kind of self-constituted sutler to the corps.

She seemed beside herself now, for, after a pause for breath, she darted to the couch where the pretty patrician lady lay, and exclaimed, in tones hoarse with excitement, "Mrs. Clare, dear, is it lyin' here ye are, as if nothin' were doin'! Get up and fly for the love o' Heaven. Ochone! ochone! It's small chance ye'll have, anyhow."

"Fly where? From what?" cried Mrs. Clare, her indignation at the intrusion lost in astonishment, as the other, having deposited her bundle on the bed, almost lifted her on to her feet.

"From murther and slaughterin', an' worse a million times to the like o' you an' me!" Mary cried, her rough hands busy in thrusting Mrs. Clare's little, bare feet into a pair of shoes, and flinging a dark cloak, which happened to come handy, over her muslin wrapper. "Shure, an' aren't the Sepoy divils afther enterin' the depôt, an' our soldiers drugged aforehand, and no shot fired to stay them! Hark to thim, dear! There's a cry! Och! hurry, hurry, as ye're a livin' woman. There'll not be wan alive an hour hince, nor we aither if we're not gone from here!"

"The Sepoys here?" stammered Mrs. Clare. "Do you mean our battalion has risen?"

"An' have let in a couple of hundhred more, at laste. Misthress, dear, for God's sake don't stan' there. There was wan of ours as wasn't drugged—Sergeant McCann he was—an' the thing I stumbled over at the gate was the dead body of him hacked thro' and thro'. Shure, an' I turned straight roun' an' niver stayed till I got here; for I knew 'twas in yer bed ye were, an' none to purtect ye."

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"Thank you," said Mrs. Clare faintly and very pale, but still holding back; "but go yourself. I could not run or walk either far, and Captain Clare will be back in a few hours now, if he be alive, and if not, I—I would rather die here."

"*Die*, is it," cried Mary contemptuously, "and d'ye think I would be afther fearin' death, if that was all? Or d'ye think it's betther for the captain to fin' ye a slave to the black haythens and yer child's brains dashed out on the stones, as they did wid the childher at Meerut? Missis, I'm flyin' for Jim's sake an' me boy's here, an' I'm not goin' widout you; for the captain's been good and kind to Jim. Come, ma'am, hurry! Ye'll walk betther yersel' than if ye were tied to a gun an' driven. Here, take hould o' that shawl while I rowl the childher together. I'll carry them, and you kape close to me, and don't spake above yer breath. This way—so!"

The will of the Irish girl was paramount to-day, and the lady followed, with the meekness of a child, in her footsteps.

The eastern sky was red as blood from the blazing roof of her own house in the officers' quarters; and in that scarlet light Mrs. Clare could see the hillside and the walls of the cantonment dotted over with black figures, while the whole air seemed alive and quivering with a turmoil of shrieks, cries, and yells of agony or triumph.

One look was sufficient, and then, as the whole history of their successful treachery burst on her mind, Gertrude Clare cowered closer to the side of the Irish girl whose very existence she had hitherto so loftily ignored, and clung to her, murmuring: "We shall never escape! What hope is there for us?"

"Lave hould an' follow me, or it'll be thrue for ye," Mary muttered in curt response as she dived into a dense thicket of prickly pear and jungle grass, tramping a path in front with her strong feet, and leaving many a fragment of her ragged garments, many a streak of blood on the thorny boughs, yet never suffering a touch to disturb the sturdy, brown-skinned, eight-months' baby, or the tiny infant of scarce twice as many days which she carried so tenderly on her right arm.

On and on, tearing their feet and hands, stooping their heads low, praying inwardly the whole time, they struggled on for half-an-hour, treading their way at random through the scrub, only trying for the time to put so much more space between them and their foes; on and on, the Irish girl walking with the firm elastic tread of one well used to the march, the English one staggering after with a step momentarily slacker and more uncertain, until they reached the outskirts of the wood, and found themselves on the edge of a large field of Indian corn, covering the summit of the low hill where they stood.

Then as Mary stooped lower with her burden, that her head might not show above the tall green stalks through which she was about to make her way, Mrs. Clare gasped out:

"Go on. Save yourself. I can do no more," and sinking down, fainted away at her humble friend's feet. At the same moment the latter's baby, awakened by the sudden shock of the falling body, set up a piteous wail.

Half beside herself, Mary crouched down, hushing her baby to her breast with one hand, while with the other she loosened the fainting woman's dress, and turned her face upward that the night air might refresh her.

Loosened the fainting woman's dress.

She could do no more. There was not a drop of water near to moisten the lips already black and parched, but after a brief while, when her child, being fed and soothed, had fallen asleep again, she laid both babes down by Mrs. Clare and crept on hands and knees to a little eminence, where she could have a view of their surroundings.

Poor Gertrude! she was roused from her merciful stupor by something sharp stinging, and, opening her eyes, saw Mary leaning over with a branch of some thorny plant in her hand; but not even the seemingly cruel method of her revival recalled her so much as the look of horror on the girl's face.

"Foller me—so!" the latter whispered, and, crawling behind her, Gertrude came to a point where, peeping through the sheltering stack of the Indian corn, they could see the valley beneath. They were not more than half a mile, as the bee flies, from the mosque. It lay just below them, its white domes gleaming out of the tufts of palms, like a globe of frosted silver in the moonbeams. Mary pointed to it silently, and Gertrude felt her blood grow chill within her veins as she saw five armed figures, their black faces and white turbans plainly discernible in the pure white light, as they stole through the garden to the door from which the two women had so recently escaped.

"Hark!" Mary whispered—and even with the words there came to them upon the wind the faint cry of baffled rage, as the murderers found that their prey had escaped. The next moment they came rushing out into the garden again, beating about in search of their victims. Mary's hand closed on her companion.

"If they find our thrack, an' come shtraight afther us, they'll be ten minutes gitten' here," she said huskily. "An' if we're not gone—Missis, dear, I only ax ye to run ten minutes more. If we can but get through this field, an' down on the other side toward the river, I know where we can hide, an' they'll not be follerin' fur fear o' bein' cut off by our men. Only kape up yer heart for the love o' God, an' thry."

"I will do my best," answered Mrs Clare; "but if I drop, leave me. It will not be your fault, and I shall not suffer long."

Mary said nothing, but squeezed the slim, white hand in her brown and horny one, and then, only waiting to lift the mercifully sleeping children, they resumed their flight.

But before they reached the further extremity of the cornfield, Mrs. Clare stumbled, and Mary stopped of her own accord, warned by the long-drawn, gasping breath, that her companion's strength had well-nigh come to an end. A new idea seized her, and, taking off her cloak, she succeeded in strapping the infants on to her back, then, making Mrs. Clare take her arm, led her on, cheering the sinking woman every now and then with an encouraging whisper.

It was down-hill now, but every step was a stumble, every breath a prayer, and they had gained such a little distance.

Suddenly Mrs. Clare reeled, and the hold on Mary's arm gave way. The red spots on her cheeks had died out, and a mortal pallor was there instead.

"Mary," she said, every breath coming with a moan, "leave me now—I command it. You've done your best. God bless you. Go, take your child, and give me mine. It could not live long without me, and I can go no further, not one step."

And looking in her face, Mary Kirwan saw it was true. What was to be done? For a moment she stood still and mute, then a scarlet colour rushed into her cheeks, and she fell on her knees. "Oh, Lord Christ, I see a way, but it's hard!. Help me to do it; for there's no other at all.

It was a moment's prayer, and no sooner uttered than she rose, undid the children from her back, handed Mrs. Clare her own, and tenderly wrapping up the other in her cloak, darted away with it among the corn stalks without a word.

When she came back, her arms were empty, and her face was white as death.

"Mary!" cried the English mother, "where is it? What have you done with it, your child?"

"I've put it down," her lips quivering as she raised the other. "Maybe they'll not be afther seein' him (for it's in a

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hole he is—among the corn) widout he cries, an' he'll not do that the darlin', when I've nursed him but the now, an' wrapped him up warm to slape."

"But Mary, my God! What do you mean?"

"Mane! shure, that I can't carry you and the childher too," said Mary simply, "an' it's thrue, ye can't walk any further. Och! don't be talkin', but hould yer own tight while I lift ye. Shure it's not the feather-weight ye are. Don't be talkin', I say," checking with an almost fierce authority the resistance which Mrs. Clare would fain have offered as she was lifted from the ground. "But iv yer never axed the Mother o' God to pray for ye an' yours, as you're a mother yersel', ax Her now for me."

And on she strode as she spoke, walking far more swiftly now under her burden than when she had to accommodate her steps to the fragile creature behind her; though, now and then, a sob broke from her bosom, rending the heart of the prostrate woman she carried.

Yet it was not the weight that distressed her. It was the mother's heart in her, fighting and breaking for that sturdy, brown-skinned infant, whom every step put farther and farther away from her, and still she hurried on more swiftly for the agony in her mind, sometimes running, sometimes stumbling, sometimes nearly falling, never daring to pause, or lift her head once for a single breath.

Mary felt sure that, could she only reach a shelter she knew of, namely, an ancient tomb, half hidden among jungle and creepers in a thicket near the river, and which, though once often used as a sleeping place by tramps, fakirs, and smugglers, had, by some accident mysteriously significant to the natives, become unclean and had been shunned henceforth as an accursed and polluted spot by Mohammedan and Brahmin alike, they might safely hide there till the return of the regiment from Susi.

And she did. As the eastern sky flushed into a delicate rose colour, tinting earth and cloud with an ineffable opaline glory, her sore and weary feet stumbled heavily into the thicket of which she had been in search, and dropped upon the damp earth within with a cry of thankfulness, half inaudible from fatigue.

They were safe.

And Mrs. Clare, rising to her knees, took the brown hands, to which she owed her life, in her little fingers, covering them with tears and kisses as again and again she poured thanks and blessings on her preserver. Mary checked her.

"Whist! Not a word above yer breath! Shure it's scarce a hundred yards we are from the road, an' I'm hearin' somethin' passin' the now."

Men's voices were indeed audible, laughing and talking loudly along the road. There might have been half-a-dozen by the noise, but whether they were deserters, or only coolies on their way to labour, the women could not tell, as they cowered in the inmost recesses of their sanctuary, not even venturing for the next half-hour to creep out to drink at a little muddy pool among the reeds, though their lips and throats were so parched and swollen by this time that, during the period of waiting, they had hardly been able even to whisper a word to one another.

Mrs. Clare, with great discretion, drank sparingly, and would fain have coaxed Mary to do the same, but the latter plunged her hot face deep in the water, swallowing it in gulps, and only replying when she had slaked her thirst to the full.

"Lave me alone; it's got to last me till I get back."

"Back! where?" Mrs. Clare asked, but was abashed by the reply:

"Shure, an' is it lave me child for good I'd be doin'?"

Gertrude burst into tears. Her long fainting fit had confused her, and she now reproached herself bitterly.

"Ah! how could I let you! And you whom I've often looked down on! Why didn't you leave me instead?"

"You're a woman yersel'," said Mary gently. "An' could you be afther lavin' a feller-woman now to the marcy o' thim black divils? As to the boy, acushla"—her plain features working unrestrainedly with the sorrow she tried not to express in words—"wasn't it betther to lave him awhile, an' he slaping like an angel in me ould cloak, that's for all the world the colour o' the groun'? Shure, I tuk him to the font meself afore iver we left Calcutta, as is more than iver ye've been afther doin' for yours, I'll be bound, the purty, wee craythur! So I'd the clane right to say to our Blessed Lord: 'It's You he belongs to now, so take care of him till I'm comin' back, for it's meself is takin' care of a poor unbelavin' sowl for You,' I said, an' where would that be ef I didn't?"

"But Mary, Mary dear," cried Mrs. Clare, weeping more freely for the girl's simplicity and confidence. "Don't go *now*. It will be only throwing away your own life, and if they have discovered him—oh! please God, they have not!—it will be too late, too late to save. Don't, Mary! The Sixth will be here a few hours hence, and then we will go back together under good guard and search for him, and he shall never want for anything again if I can help it, or you either. Only stay!"

But Mary shook her rough head doggedly.

"I could thrust Him above to help me when I was thryin' to help Him," she said; "but ef 'twas carin' for meself I was—an' shure anyhow is it I could sit here an' me purty, bright-eyed boy, Jim's one bairn, tugging at me heart-strings all the while?"

And yet it was with a stern, beautiful patience that she delayed another ten minutes to feed Mrs. Clare's tiny infant, which had awakened, crying with a hunger which no longer warded off rapid movement, and which its poor young mother had no power to relieve. Then, her work of charity completed, the private's wife gave the babe back to its mother, and, cautioning the latter to keep well within shelter till she saw relief at hand, and undaunted by the growing heat of the sun, her terrible fatigue and bleeding feet, untroubled even by the prospect of almost certain discovery, she sallied forth on the return search for her child.

Left alone, the hours passed wearily with the officer's wife. She was worn out with fatigue and agitation. She was faint with hunger, and, do what she would, her child wailed and fretted.

The hours wore on. The sun rose higher and higher, till the low entrance to the ruin glowed like a yellow mouth of a furnace. The child, tired with crying, fell asleep again; and she herself was resting in a sort of half-slumber of exhaustion, when a noise from without startled her into a sitting position, her heart sick with terror. There was the regular tramp of many men coming up the road.

Was it the Sixth? Or was it the party of mutineers which had separated from their fellows?

If it were the former, and she remained in her hiding-place, they might pass on and leave her to perish of hunger and weakness. If the latter, and she were to show herself, God only could foresee her fate in its full horror. And the tramp, tramp, came nearer and nearer. She could hear the murmur of voices, and catch now and then the gleam of arms among the trees which hid the ruin.

The suspense became intolerable. Laying her child gently in a dark corner, she crawled to the entrance and looked out. A body of troops were passing, and almost passed. She could see the scarlet uniforms of the Sixth, and the Scotch caps and grey jackets of Captain Donaldson's men. She could almost hear the words of the soldiers, as at quick march and in double file they passed along, their sternly vengeful faces telling of the work they had been doing and the work they were about to do, and yet, when she tried to call to them, her tongue clove to her mouth, a mist rose before her eyes, and, with a faint cry, she sank face foremost on the ground.

When she recovered she was in her husband's arms, and his grateful tears were on her face. Little did that young officer, who had heard of the attack on Flutterhabad and the wholesale massacre, expect to see his wife alive and safe. The Sixth had indeed met and defeated the party of which they were in search, with more ease than they expected, and were in consequence returning rather earlier, when met *en route* by the body of mutineers dispatched for that purpose, and who, by first harassing and then leading them in pursuit, had without the loss of more than two or three men contrived to delay them two good hours on their way.

But what of Mary?

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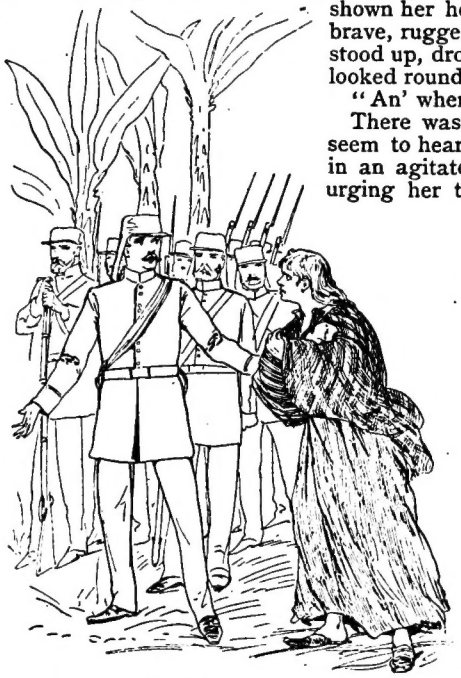
No one can tell what she endured in her return search for her child. It was then in the last week of May, and the heat at eight o'clock was so intense that it seemed to frizzle the brains in her uncovered head. She had lost a shoe, and her feet were cut and swollen. Her head felt swollen too, and her eyes dim and distended. It was the effect of the too hearty drink in the hot sun and the want of food, which was, besides, making her sick and giddy; and as the sun grew hotter and hotter, a species of delirium seemed to seize her. She saw before her a crowd of Sepoys, with inflamed eyes and dark, ferocious faces, and in the midst of them her baby held on high by one of the miscreants, in the act of dashing its brains out upon the ground.

She shrieked aloud in her agony, darted wildly forward, stumbled, fell headlong to the ground, staggered to her feet again, and, lo! the Sepoys were gone, and, instead her child was wailing, wailing, somewhere in front of her. Yes, she saw it now distinctly, wrapped in the cloak as she had left it among the cornstalks, and near it, crouching for the spring, a huge Bengal tiger. Again she screamed and sprang forward, throwing out her arms wildly to scare the animal, and again the horrible vision vanished, only to be renewed a thousand times in a thousand different forms.

Once she met a gentle-looking Parsee face to face, who stopped her and gave her some "chuppatties" (coarse meal cakes) and a drink of sour milk, and warned her earnestly against returning to the town, signifying, by gestures as well as by words, the fate which had befallen her friends there. She ate and drank ravenously of what he gave; but only shook her head at his advice and hastened on. The Parsee went his way, shaking his head. Evidently the poor woman had been driven mad by the slaughter of those belonging to her, and he should only embarrass and compromise himself by trying to detain her.



"An' where's my Jim, at all?"

And then at last, all at once, the weight rolled off her brain, and the red mist from before her eyes. She was on her knees in the maize-field and in front of her was the very hole where she had laid her infant with the rusty plaid cloak crumpled on the edge of it.

But the child?

For a moment an awful despair seized her, and a cry broke from her lips, so shrill and unearthly that it scared away a couple of vultures who were hovering low over something a yard or two distant. A little cooing, gurgling note of pleasure answered, and turning, she saw a round, rosy face among the cornstalks, and a pair of fat hands, and naked, dimpled feet, trying, by stretching and crawling, to get at the mother who had left it.

When Captain Clare, accompanied by four of his men, entered the same field in search of his wife's preserver, they found Mary quietly seated on the ground, nursing her baby, and the ringing cheer which greeted the sight might have shown her how her heroism was appreciated by those brave, rugged hearts. She hardly heeded it; but just stood up, dropping her courtesy to the officer, and then looked round at the others.

"An' where's my Jim, at all?"

There was no immediate answer. The men did not seem to hear, and Captain Clare began thanking her in an agitated way for all that she had done, and urging her to hasten with him to the carriage at the foot of the hill, where Mrs. Clare was waiting for her, which was to take them both under a strong escort to Susi, and thence, as soon as possible, to Calcutta. Mary courtesied again.

"Thank ye, sir. It's very good ye are to me; but I'm not wantin' to lave me husband, though it's not 'on the strength' I am. Shure, I'll go down to him the now, since he's no mind to come up to me. Maybe, though, he's not got lave to fall out o' the ranks for that."

The last words were said piteously, her eager, excited blue eyes lifted to the officer's kindly face. Very gently he took her arm.

"Come to the carriage first, Mary, any way. Mrs. Clare wants to—to speak to you. My good girl, my brave girl, you're not going to give way now!"

"Is it *kilt* he is?" she asked hoarsely; and then, before any reply could be given, save the mute answer of the eyes, the child fell from her arms, she reeled suddenly, and dropped, a senseless, crumpled heap, at the commander's feet.

When Mary recovered from the shock occasioned by her husband's death, she accompanied Mrs. Clare to England, and was ever after her constant companion. The two boys became fast friends, and when young Kyle, Mary's boy, grew to man's estate, Mrs. Clare had him established in a small business, for, as she said, "she could never do enough for the son of the woman who had so generously saved her life."

THE EXPLANATION OF THOSE PIOUS BURIALS.

ON the frontier opposite Spain, like a dog couchant between two pillars, lies Querterac, guarding the entrance to a valley. On the right and left the mountains, broken for a space, resume their monotonous, unending chain. Querterac is a small, old-fashioned town that was once fortified. It is difficult of access, and has about 6,000 inhabitants.

On the neighbouring mountain, regarded as neutral, was gathered a population as doubtful in morality as in nationality—a confused mixture of Gascons, Basques, and Catalonians, whose chief occupations were highway robbery and smuggling.

About the middle of the present century cholera was devastating Spain, Italy, and France.

In the country and in the towns there was a cessation from the activities of life. The inhabitants barricaded themselves in vain against the invisible enemy, which glided treacherously through half-opened doors, locks, and unsuspected openings in roofs and walls. In Querterac, a victim from the first day, nothing could be seen but deserted streets and houses closed from top to bottom. Those who fell in the public squares had no assistance, for pity was dead through fear.

The civil authorities were disobeyed and despised as useless and powerless, no regard being paid to the official notices that were placarded on the doors and walls.

If fear was great and selfishness hard in the city, the country was even more distracted and cruel. If a beggar showed himself at the door of some lonely farmhouse he was received with stones and bullets. The dogs were set on him, and he was maltreated.

Perfectly absurd stories were circulated among the country people. They said that cholera was not so bad as it was reported to be. Many people who had seemingly died of cholera had really been poisoned by some enemy, who had drugged the water or kneaded arsenic into the bread.

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In short, the people in the valley were eternally in dread of some hostile action on the part of "those rascals up above," as they called the mixed race that dwelt in the caves and recesses of the mountains.

The opportunity was a good one for these mountaineers to plunder the flocks and property of those below, but "those rascals up above" never stirred from their holes. Why?

Well, they also were dying. They seemed to die in more astonishing proportions than elsewhere, and one never could have believed that there were so many people in those mountains.

At Querterac there was considerable astonishment, for after a few days the epidemic began to decrease, but the mountaineers insisted on dying. The townspeople did not understand it, but they could not help admiring the piety of those people above. Every evening three or four jolting vehicles loaded with coffins and followed by men and women in mourning descended slowly through the ravine, entered the village and passed silently toward the cemetery.

The shadows of the mourning cortége in the light of the glowing fires cast dark, fantastic pictures on the walls. The passers-by fled at the sight, seized with fresh alarm. It was over a lonely route that the procession passed to reach the cemetery, and those poor wretches, those heathens, followed their dead to their last resting-place, when it would have been so easy to throw the bodies into the ravines and rivers or to leave them to the wolves and eagles; but no, those wanderers, those aliens, scrupulously regarded the rites of burial.

The charge of the custom-house at Querterac is one of great importance, and generally falls to a competent officer. From this point inspectors, going to and fro, carefully watch the narrow valley which is the only easy entrance from Spain. During the epidemic death interrupted the routine of duty, for on some days twenty men fell victims to the disease, and the survivors, distracted by the panic, neglected their work.

One man only kept his post, the old man Valgenod. He always sounded the final "d." He was a born custom-house officer. He belonged to that race. He could smell a smuggler three hours before he saw him, and six miles off a bale of tobacco would make him sneeze.

Night and day he kept on his rounds, declaring that it would be an absurdity for an old custom-man to die of the colic, as he called the cholera. The guards were increased, and Valgenod went the rounds of those who did not answer to their names at roll-call.

He was always watching the mountain, the lair of the monsters. He knew them every one—those smugglers on whom he had fired so often when he had found them prowling round the town on some dark night.

There was one old man, Father Meritas, a grey bearded gipsy, with whom Valgenod had frequently come into contact, and each had a high opinion of the cleverness of the other.

"Valgenod!" said Meritas. "The scoundrel! If it were not for him! If he were only out of the way!"

"Meritas!" said Valgenod. "The rogue! The day after my death he will smuggle Madrid into France."

Meritas was a smuggler—as Valgenod was a custom-house officer—from temperament and instinct. It was his vocation. Numerous were the tricks that he invented, the schemes that he devised, and he was never caught.

In the caves of the mountains were hidden bales of tobacco, cloths, skins, Spanish laces, and liquors. In some way or another all this merchandise was gradually smuggled into France, but how, no one, not even Valgenod, knew.

It was the third day of the epidemic, just about twilight, that Valgenod, scenting the winds and looking round, saw a cart, drawn by a broken-winded mule, entering the valley and going straight toward the gates of the town. Behind came Meritas and a few ill-clad fellows of his tribe, who were singing psalms in a harsh patois. The cart was a railed one, and, in spite of the approaching darkness, the sergeant made out the long shape of a coffin.

"Ah," he moaned. "There is suffering up there, too. Honest people are not the only ones to die, I see."

He drew himself up to let the procession pass and gave the military salute—a corpse deserved such salute even though it was one of those reprobates.

Before the walls of the custom-house, Meritas, whose eyes gleamed like two fires in his pale face, raised his long lean arms to heaven and sobbed:

"My wife! my wife! my wife!"

"Poor old man," said Valgenod, and he drew a match to light his pipe, for he felt an unusual tenderness creeping over him.

Two days later another procession was seen winding along the mountain, and Meritas was walking behind. This time there were three coffins in the cart.

"Well, now," thought Valgenod, "these cannot all be his. Perhaps it is a subscription."

But the old smuggler was tearing his beard and shrieking in broken tones at the top of his voice:

"My sons! my sons! Who can give me back my sons?"

The sergeant saluted three times, and the entire post, drawn out in line along the open gratings, uncovered piously before the bitter grief of the distracted father.

Every evening at the setting of the sun a funeral procession passed through the town, and Meritas invariably formed part of the cortége. He walked with a friend on each side supporting him, calling aloud on God, blessing the dead and lamenting his fate. He buried in order his wife, his sons, his daughters, his nephews, his cousins. One day he besought Valgenod to kill him, and end his suffering.

"He is getting silly, and there is some reason for it," said the sergeant shrugging his shoulders.

Finally, so strong is pity, he felt his former respect grow into love for his old enemy.

These funerals continued for three weeks. Then the people in the town began to wonder. Querterac awoke from its stupor, and the epidemic seemed to have disappeared. The deaths became fewer and fewer; the windows were opened; every one would have regained confidence if it had not been for those mournful processions that came down every evening from above, a lamentable proof that the epidemic was still raging, if not in the city, at any rate in the outskirts.

One evening—it was the last—three carts, as usual, were crossing the city bridge. One of them, the foremost, struck against a mile stone. The mule backed, and the cart upset, throwing its contents, two coffins, at the feet of Valgenod. In the fall, the lid of one of the coffins fell off.

Immediately Meritas and all the mourners, spreading out their arms like the wings of birds, fled to the mountains. Valgenod was astonished to see instead of the corpse, before which he was already preparing to flee, rolling between his legs four bales of merchandise carefully marked.

"To arms," he cried.

The post ran up, but it was too late. The smugglers had escaped. The other carts were seized and the coffins opened. They were all filled with merchandise. Valgenod tore his hair.

This then was the key to the mystery, and the explanation of those numerous deaths, of those pious burials. Not one of those "rascals up above" had died from cholera. Meritas had not lost a wife or sons, daughters or cousins. All the coffins that had entered Querterac, and had been saluted by the custom-house officials, had been loaded with lace, liquors, and tobacco.

They had been taken through the deserted streets, and the contents stored in a house at the gates of the cemetery. When the house was searched it was empty. The merchandise had been sent away every day to the large towns.

The villagers smiled. Valgenod swore that in future he would refuse to pass a skeleton unless he turned his pockets inside out. Meritas disappeared.

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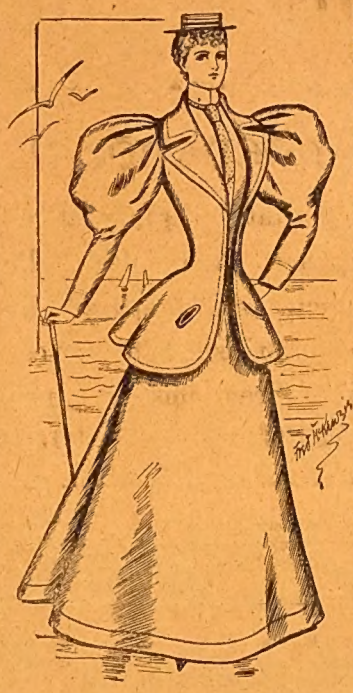

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Age last Birthday.	The Combined Experience Table Per Year.	£400. Average Cost of £400 in British Assurance Companies Per Year.	I.O.F. Table of Premiums Per Year.	Annual Saving to Members of the I. O. F.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s d.	£ s. d.
21	3 1 6	8 1 4	3 12 0	4 9 4
25	3 4 10	8 16 4	3 16 0	5 0 4
30	3 10 4	10 0 4	4 0 0	6 0 4
35	3 17 6	11 9 4	4 12 0	6 17 4
40	4 6 4	13 6 4	5 0 0	8 6 4
45	5 1 10	15 13 8	6 0 0	9 13 8
49	6 12 10	18 3 4	7 16 0	10 7 4

The full sum assured is payable at death. All premium-paying of ordinary members in the I.O.F. ceases at 70 years of age, when one-tenth of the amount assured is paid to them annually, the unexhausted balance being payable at death. The entrance fees are very moderate, a £100 policy costing 17s.; £200, £1 16s. 6d.; £400, £2 3s.; 600, £2 9s. 6d.; £800, £2 16s.; and £1,000, £3 5s. Court Dues (10s. to 12s. per annum) have to be paid by each member.

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